

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 10TH JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: **Councillors:** Thompson (Chair), Addy, Chapman, Crossley, Merryweather, Morgan, Parsons and Standbridge.

The Clerk: A Marabese.

Others: Ward Councillors Brown and Liddiard, and 2 members of the public.

The Chairman declared the meeting open at 7:05pm.

729. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- a. Cllr Morgan has advised that he would be late arriving to the meeting.

730. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

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 remind attendees of COVID safe meeting guidelines.

The Chairman reminded all those present at the meeting of the COVID-safe meeting guidelines.

- b. 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, if required. Carried.

- c. Other information.

- Recent reported crime statistic for Meppershall show that they plummeted in December from 13 to 7 which is a positive sign.
- NALC have issued their response to DEFRA's environmental consultation and included the concerns raised by MPC and many other parish councils.
- A grant application has been received from CPRE and it was requested that this be included in the agenda.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to add to the agenda under the Finance section. Carried.

731. 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 735.a.i-iii.

Cllr Standbridge declared an interest in agenda item 735.a.iv.

732. PUBLIC SESSION

At this point (7:10pm) 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 Brown advised the meeting that:

- CBC population – Predicted population growth figures for CBC have been released. 294,000 currently. 321,000 predicted for 2031.
- Council tax collection – In 2021 CBC collected 96.1% of council tax due. The average in England was 95.7%.

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- Council tax 2022-23 – CBC council tax consultation is currently underway. CBC wishes to increase council tax by an overall 1.95% (1% of social care and 0.95% for frontline services). Despite revenue from council tax CBC will still need to find savings of £5.9million.
- Grass cutting subsidy – Query has been raised with CBC officers regarding the subsidy paid to parish councils that has not increased in many years despite costs increasing.
- Footpath replacement – The footpath outside the Sugar Loaf PH is to be resurfaced on 31st January 2022.
- Schools for the Future – A meeting will be held on 20th January when it is hoped to confirm timings for the Shefford and Stotfold cluster move to two-tier. Children will continue to attend their current schools until changes are made and consultations conducted.

Ward Councillor Liddiard advised the meeting that:

- COVID update – COVID numbers are the highest they have ever been with more people in hospital. CBC is urging residents to get vaccinated and have their booster as soon as they can.
- Government grants – More grants are now available to businesses in the hospitality sector and applications can be made via the CBC website.
- A00176 Traffic Calming Notice – Would be interested in MPC feedback regarding agenda item 738.a (proposed traffic speed calming tables outside 32 Shefford Road).

The following questions were raised or comments made by members of the public:

- CBC is to be commended for their organisation of the vaccine centre at Priory House and also the minibus issuing lateral flow test kits that recently visited Meppershall. When we hear from friends and family what is happening elsewhere in the country, we realise how lucky we are in this regard. *It was requested that the Chairman email the CBC Director of Public health to offer our appreciation.*
- Are businesses being notified of the business grants available from CBC? *ML – Yes, Previous applicants are being notified.*
- The meeting with Cllr Dalgarno has been changed to 21st January at 10am, will Cllr Liddiard be able to attend? *ML, Yes.*
- Housing developments along Shefford Road (Stocken House and land opposite 34 to 42 Shefford Road) have removed all of the historic hedge. Will the hedge be replaced with proper semi mature hedging plants rather than whips? *Clerk to check planning permission granted and email Planning Officers.*

Standing orders were reinstated at 7:30pm

733. MINUTES

- a. To receive and approve distributed minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday, 13th December 2021.
Proposed Cllr Standbridge/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved that the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday 13th December 2021 are an accurate record of the proceedings and that they be signed by the Chairman. Carried.

734. PROCEDURES, CONSULTATIONS & LEGAL

a. Co-Option

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

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No new requests received. The Clerk was asked to submit another article to the Messenger.

b. Procedures

- i. To review COVID Safe Risk Assessment.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved re-adopt MPC COVID Safe Risk Assessment until April 2022. Carried.

- ii. To approve future MPC Meeting Date Schedule.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved to approve proposed MPC Meeting Date Schedule until March 2023 (meeting in July to be changed to 25th July). Carried.

c. Consultations

- i. To consider response to budget consultations from CBC, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue and Bedfordshire Police.

CBC plan to increase council tax by 1.95% (1% for adult social care and 0.95% for funding other services). Beds Fire and Rescue propose to increase council tax by 1.99%. Beds Police want to increase council tax by £10 a year for a band D property but have provided no more information. All budget proposals are under consultation. *Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Clerk respond to in support of CBC and Beds Fire and Rescue budget consultations but question proposals made by Beds Police for lack of information and clarity. 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 changeover will take place in after Friday 14th January (website first and then emails to follow). Changes have been made with the Clerk to the website – dedicated Gnomes page added and addition of Noticeboard for stories. View of the site have gone up 20%.

e. Stocken House Green Space

- i. Update from Clerk and Cllr Thompson

Emma Halpin of Ross Williams continues to liaise with Davidson's solicitors. The Clerk has arranged to meet with Mr Alderman who has agreed to assist with monitoring of planting on site. Reports from residents indicate that planting has taken place in some areas.

- ii. Invitation to attend show home launch on weekend of 29th January.

Clerk contacted by Liberty (PR company dealing with launch). They would like MPC to attend the launch and have been in communication with both Messenger editors and the Meppershall Academy (contributed £1.5k to books for school). They have invited local residents who have been raising money for charity to the event and will be contributing to their charitable efforts. In discussing donations the Clerk mentioned potential donations to an MPC defibrillator fund and Liberty have confirmed today that Davidsons will contribute £1.5k to this. Councillors agreed that the site and future residents must be made welcome and feel part of the village.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Chairman and the Clerk attend the Davidson's show home launch event on behalf of MPC. Carried.

f. Collaboration with Gravenhurst Parish Council

- i. To consider sharing of resources with Gravenhurst Parish Council and any ensuing actions.

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As the Clerk works for both Meppershall and Gravenhurst Parish Councils it may be beneficial to both organisations to share resources e.g.: computer, laptop, mobile phone, however an agreement between both organisations would need to be drawn up to do this.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Standbridge. Resolved that the Procedures and Legal working group put together an agreement for sharing of resources with Gravenhurst Parish Council for approval at the next meeting. Carried.

g. Futures Working Group

i. To consider remit, set up and membership

Councillors discussed the proposal that, as a next step on from the Neighbourhood Plan, MPC set up a Futures working group to look at the medium future of the village and how residents may want it to grow in the future. It is envisaged that the working group although supported by MPC would be made up of village residents. Councillors agreed that they would be unhappy to see a Futures working group that was focussed entirely on future residential development even if it would be important to consider whether the village could accept any more development greater than 50 dwellings. The working group should also focus on community, facilities, landscape, environment etc. and should look to address issues such as do we want Meppershall to be considered a commuter village as opposed to promoting local employment. The Clerk and Cllr Parsons were asked to put together a scope / remit of the working group for the next meeting.

735. FINANCE

a. Purchase Orders

Cllr Thompson did not participate in agenda items 735.a.i to iii having previously declared an interest. Cllr Parsons took over as Chairman of the meeting for these agenda items.

i. To consider purchase of tables and chairs for MVH Beech meeting room at a cost of £722.

Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Merryweather. Resolved that the Clerk purchase of tables and chairs for MVH Beech meeting room at a cost of £779+VAT and that they be gifted to the Village Hall (Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 s.19). Carried.

ii. To approve purchase of 2 x lockable filing cabinets for MPC archive storage (to be sited at MVH) at cost of £206.88.

Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Merryweather. Resolved that the Clerk purchase 2 x lockable filing cabinets for MPC archive storage (to be sited at MVH) at cost of £206.88). Carried.

iii. To approve purchase and installation of defibrillator to be located at Village Hall.

The Village Hall Committee have confirmed an appropriate location for installation. Cllr Parsons also noted that the Shefford Road end of the village is beyond a reasonable distance from the village hall for access to a defibrillator and therefore MPC should seek to identify a location for a fourth defibrillator in the village. It was also suggested that MPC organise a training session for residents on the use of a defibrillator via Community Heartbeat.

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Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Merryweather. Resolved that the Clerk purchase and organise the installation of a defibrillator, housing unit and sign to be located at the Village Hall, and then seek to organise training via Community Heartbeat. Carried.

- iv. To consider purchase of mobile phone from Cllr Standbridge at a cost of £40 for use by the Community & Environment Officer.

Cllr Standbridge did not participate in agenda items 735.a.i to iii having previously declared an interest.

Councillors confirmed that the mobile phone was in excellent working order and could be used with SIM card.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Council purchase a mobile phone from Cllr Standbridge at a cost of £40. Carried.

- v. To consider cost and selection of mobile phone SIM only contracts for MPC employees and payment method.

The Clerk reported that virtually all mobile phone SIM contracts require payment via a direct debit card unless opting for a business contract which is considerably more expensive. The Clerk visited both O2 and Vodafone in Hitchin – joint cheapest plans with them would be £25 and £40 per month on minimum 24 month contracts. The Clerk and Cllr Standbridge have found a pay monthly contract with Smarty for £16 per month. Councillors were asked to make decision on how to pay for the mobile phone contracts. The Clerk offered to reclaim the cost via expenses or to research the use of a Unity Trust Corporate MultiPay Card (MasterCard Charge card - £50 set up and £3 per month charge). If Councillors chose to opt for a Corporate MultiPay Card then Financial Regulations would need to be altered.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Clerk apply for a Unity Trust Corporate MultiPay Card, amend Financial Regulations and organise mobile phone contracts with Smarty. Carried.

b. Budget and Precept

- i. To receive 2021/2022 actual v budgeted spend report.

The Clerk provided councillors with a 2021/2022 actual v budgeted spend report that included predicted expenditure until the end of this financial year. There were no questions although the report did not include a grant request received from CPRE Bedfordshire for £500 which would go towards supporting their team of planning volunteers and the overall work CPRE do. Councillors agreed that the grant request from CPRE warranted support and should be included in this year's expenditure.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Standbridge. Resolved to approve CRPE Grant request for £500 (LGA 1972, s137). Carried.

- ii. To consider and approve 2022/2023 budget and proposed reserves.

The Clerk presented the previously circulated proposed 2022-2023 budget prepared with the Finance working group and suggested reserves to council and responded to questions raised on expected expenditure, income and VAT recovery. Councillors reviewed the budget and made a few minor changes to the proposed budget in the meeting.

Proposed Cllr Standbridge/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved to approve the 2022/2023 budget as amended. Carried.

- iii. To consider and approve 2022/2023 precept request.

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The Clerk presented the previously circulated proposed 2022-2023 precept options and based upon the approved budget explained the impact on both general and earmarked reserves. Councillors discussed the merits of each option and the impact on reserves, and also other increases in council tax proposed by CBC, the Fire Service and Beds Police.

Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Parsons. Resolved to approve and to set a precept of £59,235 which equates to Band D Council Tax charge of £61.55 (increase of 2.00% or £1.22 on 2022-2022). The Clerk was also asked to write an article for the Messenger. Carried.

c. Document approval

- i. To approve amendment to bank mandate

The Clerk advised that Cllr Addy should be added to the bank mandate

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Clerk add Cllr Addy to the banking mandate. Carried.

- ii. To approve journal entries, bank reconciliations and bank statements.

The Clerk presented Bank Statements and Reconciliation reports 151 and 152 for the Current Account and 026 for the Savings Account. Reconciliation reports and statements were checked by Cllrs Chapman and Standbridge.

Proposed Cllr Chapman/Seconded Cllr Standbridge. Resolved that Bank Statements and Reconciliation reports 151 and 152 Current Account and 026 Savings Account be approved and signed. Carried.

d. 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 Crossley and Morgan.

Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Addy. 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 | | | |
| FA02-2201 | Mrs V Thorne | Salary | |
| Payment requests received before agenda published | | | |
| BACS599 | Vision (Bourne End) Ltd | VH Blinds | £1,006.29 |
| BACS600 | Mr J Thompson | HD Locks for CF Pitch & filing cabinets | £289.72 |
| BACS601 | SLCC | Practitioners Conference | £90.00 |
| BACS602 | Meppershall Messenger | Grant application 722.a.1 | £750.00 |
| SO02-2201 | Miss A Marabese | Salary (15/01/22) | |
| FA01-2201 | Mr P Carne | Final Salary 14.01.2022 & P45 | |
| BACS603 | Meppershall Village Hall | Meeting Hire May to Dec 2021 | £256.00 |

736. PLANNING AND HOUSING

a. Applications since last Council meeting for consideration

- i. None received.

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.

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737. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

a. Report from the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group – Clerk

The grant application for £2740 has been received. The plan is under review by the Clerk and Mrs Chapman.

738. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

a. CBC Highways Consultation

- i. To consider response to A00176 Traffic Calming Notice (2 x raised tables located near 34A and 36 Shefford Road and 28 Shefford Road.

Councillors discussed the proposal and alternative suggestions.

Proposed Cllr Thompson/Seconded Cllr Chapman. Resolved that the Clerk respond to A00176 requesting a single raised table. Carried.

b. OPCC grant funding update from Clerk (traffic monitoring and VAS installation)

The Clerk has not yet received data from the traffic monitoring conducted pre-Christmas but will chase the organising Highways Officer for the information. Confirmation that monitoring tubes on Fildyke Road were in the wrong place and were moved was received on 14th December. A meeting with the CBC Highways Portfolio Holder, Cllr Ian Dalgarno is now planned for 21st January with both Cllr Liddiard and Morgan in attendance.

739. ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

a. Centenary Field

- i. Update from the Clerk and Cllr Morgan

The pitch area has been secured with new combination locks. Revised quotations are still pending from Sherriffs. Cllr Morgan and Cllr Standbridge will organise a video to publicise the current situation, explain the works that will commence in March / April and the implications of the works on access.

Cllr Thompson wished to thank all those who has assisted in moving the Heras fencing facing the Village Hall off site.

b. Allotments

- i. To receive update on tenancy renewals

Only a few allotment plot holders had not paid their tenancy renewals and the Clerk was actively chasing these. Two plot holders have given up their plots.

The Clerk was asked to put an article in the Messenger regarding plot vacancies.

Councillors also noted that a number had received complaints from plot holders regarding the allotment track holes.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved that the Clerk organise / purchase of 'sieved' road plainings for delivery to the allotment. . Carried.

c. Great British Spring Clean

- i. To consider participation in the Great British Spring Clean between 25th March to 10th April 2022.

Councillors agreed that they would like the village to participate in the Great British Spring Clean.

Proposed Cllr Standbridge/Seconded Cllr Crossley. Resolved that the Clerk organise publicity for a village spring clean on Saturday 26th March, check stocks of litter pickers

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and other accessories required, and order 10 hoops, 12 litter pickers and gloves as required. Carried.

740. HEALTH & SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

a. None

741. CLOSE OF THE MEETING

The Chairman closed the meeting at 9:15pm and reminded everyone to clean their table and chair with the antibacterial wipes provided, and that the next meeting would be the 14th February 2022 in the Village Hall.

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

Glossary

- CBC = Central Bedfordshire Council
- CPRE = Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
- MPC = Meppershall Parish Council
- MVH = Meppershall Village Hall & MVHT = Meppershall Village Hall Trustees
- ORM = Old Read Meadow Nature Reserve
- VAS = Vehicle activated sign