

MEPPERSHALL PARISH COUNCIL



MINUTES OF AN ORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD IN THE VILLAGE HALL, MEPPERSHALL ON MONDAY 9TH OCTOBER 2023

PRESENT: **Councillors:** Parsons (Chair), Addy, Avrili, Merryweather, Seaman
and Standbridge (and later Litchfield).

The Clerk: A Marabese.

Others: 6 members of the public.

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

955. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- a. Councillor Wright and Ward Councillor Stephenson provided apologies that were accepted.

956. **CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- a. The Chairman read the Parish Council notice and announcement in relation to openness, transparency, and respect during meetings.
- b. To resolve to extend the meeting finish time beyond 2 hours.
Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Seaman. Resolved to extend the meeting finish time beyond 2 hours. Carried.
- c. Other information
 - None

957. **MEMBERS INTERESTS**

- a. To receive declarations of interest from Councillors on items on the agenda and requests for dispensations for disclosable pecuniary interests.
No declarations of interests or requests for dispensation received.

958. **PUBLIC SESSION**

At this point (7:10pm) the Chairman suspended Standing Orders to receive reports from our Ward Councillor, 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 Stephenson provided a report that was read by the Clerk in his absence:

- 100 High Street Planning Appeal – Summary of the appeal decision for 100 High Street, shared with councillors.
- Meeting with CBC Highways team organised for November, at which questions will be raised as to why 2023/24 projects in Meppershall are notable by their absence. Will request information on how we can input into the 2024/25 plan in good time, so there are meaningful improvements. Together with colleagues receiving answers on highways issues since May is quite elusive.
- The Police and Crime Panel this month has been postponed due to the parliamentary by-election. This means that Councillor Stephenson is not able to question the PCC about some of the matters we discussed at last month's parish council meeting e.g.: speeding, illegal E-scooters, anti-social behaviour.
- A substantive update from the administration on schools for the future is pending, but they are behind schedule.
- CBC Council meetings are starting to move towards evening sessions. We will have to watch this, because it may start to adversely impact on CBC Councillors being able to attend all Parish Council meetings and other community commitments.

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- Organisations should get in touch if they would like to discuss the ward councillor grant scheme.

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

- Stocken House development – *Can the Clerk please ask the developer when they expect to finish house building on site?*
- Centenary Field play areas and open spaces – A resident confirmed that Centenary Field is a great addition to the village however over time the area is no longer safe for children to play in and around due to the amount of dog mess and broken glass found on site (even in the children's fenced play area). It is mainly the dog mess that is an issue as it is a health hazard and unfortunately even when responsible people pick up dog mess, they leave some behind. This issue is now putting off some parents from using Centenary Field. Is there anything that the Parish Council can do to improve this situation? *The Chairman confirmed that this issue was an agenda item and would be discussed later once the public session was over. The Points raised are in tune with those raised by the Council. With regards to glass and rubbish coming from the Social Club it is important to note that MPC has already raised this issue with the MVHT. The Parish Council does have the powers to ban dogs from Centenary Field and any other land the Parish Council owns but we had hoped we could avoid this with social media campaigns urging dog owners to pick up their pets mess and volunteers picking up any dog mess they find in addition to their own. The Chairman wished to apologise on behalf of the village that the experience of residents using Centenary Field is not what the Parish Council would wish.*
- Fenced Pitch – It is good to see a football team using the pitch who are non-profit making. Are other users of the pitch also paying to use it? *The Chairman confirmed that all those hiring the pitch are invoiced for use according to the MPC Hire Policy.*
- Village Hall Car Park – Residents raised concerns about the difficulty in parking at the village hall on Mondays and Thursdays as children are congregating in the parking spaces. This also presents a safety risk. Is there anything that MPC can do? *The Clerk will report this concern to the MVHT's.*
- Noticeboards – When will MPC start to use the new noticeboard? *The Clerk needs time to print and set up the locked side. The unlocked side is open for residents to use.*
- Bin near permissive path to Nunswood – Can we have a larger bin or a specific dog bin? *The Clerk to investigate.*

Standing Orders were reinstated at 7:20pm.

959. MINUTES

- a. To receive and approve distributed minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday, 11th September 2023.
Proposed Cllr Seaman/Seconded Cllr Avrili. Resolved that the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Meppershall Parish Council held on Monday 11th September 2023 are an accurate record of the proceedings and that they be signed by the Chairman. Carried.

960. PROCEDURES, CONSULTATIONS & LEGAL

a. Co-option

- i. To consider any co-option applications received.

The Clerk advised that there was currently a vacant councillor seat, and that an expression of interests in co-option form had been received and circulated to

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Councillors with meeting papers. The individual interested in co-option; Mr Derek Litchfield was present at the meeting.

Proposed Cllr Seaman/Seconded Cllr Avrili. Resolved to co-opt Mr Derek Litchfield as Councillor to Meppershall Parish Council. Carried.

Mr Litchfield signed a Declaration of Acceptance of Office before the Proper Officer and Clerk of the Council and was then asked to join the meeting by the Chairman.

b. Invitations

- i. To provide update on Area 5 Police Priority setting meeting – Councillor Parsons. The Clerk and Councillor Parsons attended the meeting. It was agreed that the priority of focusing on ASB would continue as this is a prevalent issue for all villages and towns in the area. Other issues raised were drug dealing and youths on E-scooters and E-Bikes. Anyone with information on nuisance E-scooter and E-Bike users is asked to forward information to the Clerk. Please only take photos if safe to do so.

c. Procedures

- i. To consider how MPC can comply with its' biodiversity duty. The Clerk advised that under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 there is a duty on public authorities in England to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of their policy or decision making. Conserving biodiversity can include restoring or enhancing a population or habitat. English public authorities including parish councils should be able to show their duty to have regard for conserving biodiversity if they have identified ways to integrate biodiversity when they:

- Develop policies and strategies and put them into practice
- Manage:
 - their land and buildings
 - woodlands and nature reserves
 - gardens, parks and public open space
 - community amenities e.g. sports grounds and cemeteries
 - waste and pollution
 - energy and water
 - wood and plant products
- Make decisions about procurement.
- Implement economic, environmental, and social programmes.

This duty has been reinforced under the Environment Act 2021, and government guidance asking for councils to complete their first consideration of what action to take for biodiversity by 1 January 2024 and agree policies and objectives as soon as possible afterwards was published on 17 May 2023.

Managing sites for bio-diversity - There are some broad guidelines for managing council-owned land such as public parks, playing fields, allotments, cemeteries, and highway verges, such as:

- No mowing in May (apart from actual playing areas), to allow wildflowers to support pollinating insects.
- Only one mowing a year where possible and consider rotational mowing in sections to avoid mowing an entire site at once (good for hibernating insects and ground nesting birds) - aim to mow in August / September after seeding.

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- No artificial fertilisers that reduce the quality of grasslands
- Planting more trees and hedges
- Trialling alternatives to pesticides

Reduced mowing regimes to benefit wildlife will need to be explained to residents, some of whom will inevitably prefer every green space to be always neatly manicured. Involving residents as volunteers in a "Friends Of" group is one way to create ownership and share understanding.

The clerk was asked to write a draft policy for the November meeting and all councillors were asked to try to help the Clerk with this task.

ii. To re-approve (no changes proposed):

1. MPC Meeting Recording and Filming v2.0.
2. MPC Document Retention v1.1.
3. MPC Dignity at Work

Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved that MPC Meeting Recording and Filming, MPC Document Retention and MPC Dignity at Work Policies are re-approved. Carried.

d. PC Stores

i. To review and approve proposed PC Stores license agreement with MVH.

The Clerk and MVHT's have prepared a draft PC Stores licence agreement for both organisations to review and sign. The draft agreement was circulated to councillors with meeting papers.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved to approve the signing of the PC Stores license agreement with MVH and that Councillors Parsons and Seaman, together with the Clerk sign on behalf of MPC. Carried.

Councillors also asked the Clerk to create a Centenary Field toddler play area license agreement for review at the next meeting.

e. IT and Communications

i. Update from the Clerk.

A report on website usage was circulated to councillors at the beginning of the month. The Clerk advised all IT issues are up to date. The Clerk and Councillor Standbridge have a 'nice to do' list that they will work through when time allows.

961. FINANCE

a. Purchase Orders.

i. To approve purchase order requests.

1. All other purchase orders.

a. To repair Wry Close allotment track - £216+VAT.

b. To reinstall 5 benches on Centenary Field and remove existing concrete pads - £860+VAT.

c. To purchase additional dog poo bags as required.

Proposed Cllr Merryweather/Seconded Cllr Avrili. Resolved to arrange repair of Wry Close allotment track (Small Holdings and Allotment Act 1908 s26), reinstall 5 benches on Centenary Field (Open Spaces Act 1906 s.10) and to purchase dog poo bags (Open Spaces Act 1906 s.10). Carried.

b. Audit 2022-2023

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- i. To receive External Auditor Report and Certificate regarding 2022-2023 accounts and to review minor scope for improvement in 2023-2024.

Councillors noted the minor issues raised by the External Auditor and will endeavour not to make these minor mistakes in future.

c. 2023-2024 Budget v Actual

- i. To review actual v budgeted reports for 2023-2024

Councillors noted the content of the report provided by the Clerk.

d. Document approval.

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

Proposed Cllr Avrili/Seconded Cllr Litchfield. Resolved to approve Bank Statements & Reconciliations Current Account 180 and Savings Account 047. Carried.

e. 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 two councillors present at the meeting.

Proposed Cllr Seaman/Seconded Cllr Wright. Resolved that the schedules of payments as presented with addition of staff salaries be approved and authorised for payment by Councillor Parsons. Carried.

Payment No:	Payee	Purpose	Amount	MultiPay Card
Payments made prior to meeting date including direct debits, standing orders, salaries etc				
DD02-2310	Everflow	Allotment Water 8/11/23-7/12/23	-£233.47	In credit
DD06-2309	Lloyds Bank	Multipay monthly charge (29/08/23)	£3.00	Yes
DD04-2309	Smarty Mobile	Clerk Monthly Mobile Plan (18/09/2023)	£7.20	Yes
DD07-2309	Smarty Mobile	Env Officer Monthly Mobile Plan (28/09/23)	£5.40	Yes
BACS789	Smiths Metal Centres Ltd	Gym walker limiters	£64.06	Yes
BACS790	Ikea Limited	Munchkins Grant items	£112.00	Yes
BACS791	BHIB / Clear Councils	MPC Insurance	£996.40	
BACS794	Argos	Munchkins Grant items	£31.95	Yes
BACS795	Amazon Services Europe S.a.r.L	Munchkins Grant items - White board erasers	£2.97	Yes
BACS796	Amazon Services Europe S.a.r.L	Munchkins Grant items - Tambourines	£9.89	Yes
BACS797	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Munchkins Grant items - Baby Band	£17.98	Yes
BACS798	Amazon - INNOV2 GB Ltd	Munchkins Grant items - Petty Cash box	£10.99	Yes
BACS799	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Munchkins Grant items - First Aid Kit	£10.99	Yes
BACS800	Amazon - Azure Prism Limited	Munchkins Grant items - Whiteboard pens	£9.95	Yes
BACS801	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Munchkins Grant items- Batteries	£16.25	Yes
BACS802	Amazon Services Europe S.a.r.L	Munchkins Grant items - Maracas	£14.49	Yes
BACS803	Amazon - Winning Honst Limited	Munchkins Grant items - Tambourines	£12.40	Yes
BACS804	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Munchkins Grant items - Baby Band	£12.99	Yes
BACS805	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Gym Maintenance - Lithium Spray Grease	£10.58	Yes
BACS806	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Gym Maintenance - Rubber Mallet	£11.99	Yes
BACS807	Shefford Building Supplies Limited	Tent pegs for goal nets	£7.98	Yes
BACS808	B&M Retail Limited	PC Stores painting materials	£37.73	Yes
BACS809	Amazon Services Europe S.a.r.L	Cable Ties	£12.50	Yes
BACS810	Amazon Services Europe S.a.r.L	Gym Maintenance - O rings	£5.49	Yes
BACS811	Amazon EU S.a.r.l UK Branch	Gym Maintenance - Silicone Grease	£5.99	Yes
Payment requests received before agenda published				
BACS792	BATPC	E-learning courses - A Seaman	£34.00	
BACS793	Mazars LLP	External Auditor Fee	£504.00	
BACS812	The Community Heartbeat Trust Ltd	Defib battery	£357.00	
Payment requests received after agenda published				
BACS813	Scotts Ground Maintenance	Bollard, Noticeboard, gate install and bins	£558.00	
BACS814	Meppershall Village Hall	Hall Hire	£39.00	
BACS815	A& B Gardening Limited	Grass Cutting September 2023	£1,697.40	
BACS816	A& B Gardening Limited	Hedge and rough grass cuts CF	£522.00	

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962. PLANNING AND HOUSING

a. Applications since last Council meeting for consideration.

- i. CB/23/03002/VOC - The Pigling, Shefford Road, SG17 5LL - Variation of condition number 2 of planning permission CB/22/00799/FULL. Appeal reference APP/P0240//W/22/3307451 (Erection of two detached dwellings with associated garages and store) amendment sought to submit revised drawings for fenestration and roof space accommodation.

Proposed Cllr Parsons/Seconded Cllr Addy. Resolved that the Council objects to planning application 23/03002 pending Clerk review. Carried.

963. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

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

The Clerk and Mr Pain are planning to meet on 16th October 2023.

964. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT

a. Update on road safety improvements on new developments

Councillor Seaman is awaiting an update from Davidsons and CBC regarding the 20mph speed limit request at Woodlands Rest. The Clerk was asked to email Davidsons regarding this again.

b. To discuss and collate Meppershall highways issues and how to press for action with CBC.

Councillors agreed that an Excel list of issued is to be collated by the Clerk with input from all to include Shefford Road issues for presentation to MPC for review. Minor issues to be added to Fix My Street whilst more important issues to be presented to CBC for discussion.

965. ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE

a. Update on dog fouling campaign and issues arising.

New Facebook and social media posts have been prepared by the Clerk and will be scheduled for publication shortly. The Clerk has ordered bags for the new dog fouling dispenser on the PC Stores and Councillor Avrili is replenishing bags as and when required.

b. To consider request by resident to ban dogs from Centenary Field and deal with issues of littering and broken glass.

Councillors agreed that the Environment and Leisure Working Group should add this issue to their next meeting agenda and present recommendations for review at the next MPC meeting in November. The Clerk was also asked to write an article on litter and dog fouling for the Messenger.

c. To consider update of CBC Schedules for a) Leisure (Open space and Outdoor sport) b) Community / Village Hall Facilities. *Response required by 27th October.*

Councillors agreed to delegate updating the leisure schedule required by CBC to the Environment and Leisure Working Group and the Clerk.

d. Update on all environmental and leisure issues.

- The Clerk advised that she had not implemented the changes to allotment rents from 1st October 2023 and that all rent notifications to plot holders had been issued using old pricing with many plot holders already paying amounts due. Councillors agreed

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that any new plot holder would be charged the agreed 1st October 2023 rate but that no additional monies would be requested from existing plot holders. The Environment and Leisure Working Group were asked to review allotment rents at their next meeting with proposals for 1st October 2024 rents made at the next MPC meeting.

- The Clerk together with the Councils' grounds contractor had walked Old Road Meadow to identify issues requiring attention. A quotation is pending.

966. NOMINATION OF MEPPERSHALL VILLAGE HALL TRUSTEE

a. To discuss and consider nomination of Meppershall Village Hall Trustee

The Clerk and Councillor Addy are working together on seeking nominations.

967. PERSONNEL

a. Community and Environment Officer update.

Councillors asked the Clerk to re-advertise the role and emphasise the flexible working hours that could fit in with school timetables, training provided, pension contribution and paid holidays. The Environment and Leisure Working Group were asked to review the job role etc and make any improvements they see fit before re-advertising.

968. CLOSE OF THE MEETING

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8:50pm and reminded everyone that the next meeting would be the 20th November 2023, starting at 7pm 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
- MPC = Meppershall Parish Council
- MVH = Meppershall Village Hall & MVHT = Meppershall Village Hall Trustees
- NP = Neighbourhood Plan
- ORM = Old Read Meadow Nature Reserve
- PCC = Bedfordshire Police Crime Commissioner
- VAS = Vehicle Activated Sign