

KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting of the Parish Council held on the 8 April 2020 at 8.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Roger Willcocks (Chairman), Adrienne Charter, Charlotte Cosson, Rosemary Conybeare, Philip Farr, Jeremy Godfrey, Jenny Harrison, Steve Hemingway, Paul Jobling, Lisa Nash, Colin Stringer and Paul Ward

In attendance: The Clerk

1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2. To Receive Declarations of Interest and Dispensation

Mr Jobling declared a business interest in a groundworks quote for the Station Pub.

3. Meetings

The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 have now been issued and came into force on 4 April. This permits members to attend meetings remotely.

Regulations also remove the requirement for a parish council to hold an annual meeting in May 2020. The current appointment of chairman can continue until the Annual Meeting in May 2021, although councils may elect a chairman at earlier meeting should they wish to. The Council agreed to continue through to 2021.

4. Minutes

Proposed by Mr Ward, seconded by Mrs Conybeare and

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 11 March 2020 and the Extraordinary meeting held on 4 March 2020 be approved as a true record by the Chairman.

The minutes will be signed once lockdown and social distancing measures are relaxed.

5. To Note the minutes of Committee Meetings

The minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 11 March 2020 were noted.

6. Hire

The FA ended the football season early due to Covid 19 pandemic. Football hire of the pavilion and recreation grounds therefore finished in March. Stepping Stone Preschool was closed on 20 March 2020, per the government directive.

Proposed by Mrs Harrison seconded by Mrs Charter and

Resolved: the football clubs will not be invoiced for the final instalment of season's hire fee.

Proposed by Mrs Conybeare, seconded by Mrs Charter and
Resolved: that should Stepping Stone Preschool return for the summer term, the term charge will be prorated over twelve weeks.

7. Traffic Regulation Orders

Mrs Conybeare informed the Council that the extension of double yellow lines were discussed in 2017/18 and she thought that they were to be installed. Correspondence with CC Thake has revealed that as there have been no incidents and he is not in a position to take this forward.

Mrs Cosson was concerned that if the lines were extended then vehicles would park on the opposite side of the road, which would not resolve the problem.

The Council agreed that it would write to CC Thake to reconsider the length of the double yellow lines in this area.

8. Clerk's Report

8.1 Clare Skeels, NHDC NP officer, has confirmed that the consultation is valid.

8.2 The s173 application to restrict landscaping to the pub garden site has been rejected.

8.3 St Martins Road Public toilets were closed on 31 March 2020 until further notice

8.4 The barrier on the access road at Watton Road is being closed at 5.00pm every weekday to promote social distancing, by preventing youths in cars gathering in the evening.

8.5 The insurance broker has confirmed that due to the current circumstances, Pen/Axa have extended the unoccupancy period for full cover to remain in force.

9. Finance

9.1 To review Financial Management Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020

Proposed by Mr Stringer seconded by Mr Willcocks and

Resolved: to approve the management accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020

9.2 To review the budget for 2020/21

The Council reviewed the budget in light of the potential reduced income arising as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. Spending is to be prioritised and the clerk is to apply to Awards for All for funding for the village hall sound and light improvements.

9.3 Accounts Paid

Proposed by Mr Godfrey seconded by Mrs Cosson and

Resolved: to approve the accounts paid from 1 to 31 March 2020.

9.4 To Approve Quotes

Proposed by Mrs Cosson, seconded by Mr Farr and

Resolved: to accept the quote from Cadent of £357 to obtain a quote to upgrade the gas supply to the Station Pub.

Proposed by Mr Godfrey, seconded by Mr Charter and

Resolved: to approve the quote to lay ducting to the coach house and the pub, subject to agreement with Cadent.

Proposed by Mr Willcocks and

Resolved: to accept the quote from Scott and Associates to prepare planning application for independent access to the first floor flat at the Station Pub.

Proposed by Mr Hemingway, seconded by Mr Ward and

Resolved: to accept the quote from PML to manufacture and install an external staircase to the first floor flat at the Station Pub.

10 Station Pub

10.1 Closure

The government closed all pubs on 20 March 2020 to try to restrict the spread of Covid 19. It has put in place certain measures to support businesses whilst they are closed, but the extent of support and availability of funds is still being worked out.

The Station Pub was open for five weeks and was seen as a positive addition to the community. At present the tenants are unable to work and therefore have no income.

Mrs Charter stated that the AWP met and Mr Rawlings outlined how Fullers are operating during the Covid Pandemic. She continued that the Council and tenant had worked collaboratively and strongly recommended giving support. Fullers is writing off tenants' rent during the enforced closure. The tenant has prioritised cash flow to pay 80% of staff wages per government furlough funding. If it had been trading for five years the business would be better established, however it was only trading five weeks, of which the latter two, trade fell away dramatically due to the pandemic.

Mr Willocks stated that three months write off of rent would give the tenant breathing space to apply for grants and loans.

Mr Ward asked the Council to consider the strategic intent of purchasing the pub for community benefit. It has found a good local tenant and it should make sure that they do not become bankrupt. It would be reasonable to help them by waving rental for three months. The lack of trading history would make it difficult to get a commercial loan.

Mr Hemingway stated that there may be further support and there may be no advantage forgoing rent at this time. Many breweries are not forgiving rent and it is too early to make a decision. The rent should be deferred and many companies trade insolvently. If the tenant doesn't have the cash flow then perhaps he shouldn't be trading.

Mr Jobling asked if there was a time limit set for deferral of the rent. e.g. two years.

Mrs Cosson said that when the pub reopens the tenant would be playing catch up with rent payments and would be insolvent. It would make it difficult to do anything and the business should be a going concern.

Mrs Harrison suggested stopping the rent now and extending the lease to cover the period of closure and recovering the rent at the end.

Mr Farr agreed that the rent write off is in line with reputable landlords and is entirely sensible.

Proposed by Mrs Charter, seconded by Mrs Cosson and
Resolved: to write off three months' rent and insurance for the pub; to be reviewed at the end of June. To defer fixtures and fittings repayments for now and to defer February rent due in May until the end of the year.

The developer has excavated the main manhole in the pub yard. However due to the Covid 19 crisis work has stopped because of lack of materials. Work will recommence as soon as possible. Once this drainage work is complete, the developer proposes to dig up the car park boundary to landscape in accordance with approved plans.

11. Staff

The Council reviewed staff working during the current crisis. The government has recommended that staff should work from home where possible. The administrative staff are currently working from home. The groundsman, who works alone outside and is able to socially distance himself, is continuing to work maintaining the three recreation grounds. The pavilion cleaner is not working.

12. Any Other Business

12.1 Mrs Harrison reported that it was quiet with the access road car park closed at the weekend.

12.2 The next meeting is scheduled for 13 May 2020.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 09.30 p.m.

Chairman _____

Date _____