

KNEBWORTH PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of Knebworth Parish Council held on Wednesday 11th December 2024 at Knebworth Village Hall at 8.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Alexander Hurwitz (Chair for this meeting), Steve Hemingway, Charlotte Cosson, Adrienne Charter, Colin Stringer, Paul Jobling, Paul Ward

In attendance: Jodee White (Clerk).

No	Item	Action
1.	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received and noted from Cllr Nash until April 2024 for personal matters. Apologies were also received and approved from Cllrs Godfrey, Cameron, and Willcocks.</p>	
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
3.	<p>Public Participation</p> <p>None present.</p>	
4.	<p>To approve the minutes of the previous Parish Council meeting</p> <p>Proposed by Cllr Hemingway and seconded by Cllr Stringer and: Resolved: to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council on 13 November 2024 as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.</p>	
5.	<p>To note the minutes of Committee meetings</p> <p>The Council noted the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 13 November 2024.</p>	
6.	<p>To discuss co-option onto the Parish Council</p> <p>Nicolette Amette was unable to attend this meeting, hence co-option discussion was deferred to the next Parish Council meeting in January 2025.</p>	
7.	<p>To receive a post-Christmas lights switch on event report</p> <p>The Deputy Clerk collated responses and feedback from the lights switch-on event and produced the report distributed as appendix 3 to this meeting.</p> <p>The Council reflected on the event which was found to have a been a success and much appreciated by the local community with some areas of learning for future events identified. A meeting of the event working party is due to meet on December 17th to reflect on the lessons learnt.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Stringer and seconded by Cllr Jobling and all approved and: Resolved: for the Parish Council to run the event again in 2025.</p> <p>The Parish Council thanked staff and other volunteers for their efforts on running a very good event.</p> <p>Discussion was had that the date set for 2025 should avoid the Knebworth House Christmas event and that Darren Gilbert who had previously run the event should be notified of the decision.</p> <p>Information on the event can go in the next Parish Council magazine.</p>	
8.	<p>Recreation Ground and Pavilion Update</p> <p>A group will be running a pre-school age den building event in the Recreation Ground in December with a view to putting on more events in 2025.</p>	

	<p>They have provided their insurance details and all other details including a risk assessment have been requested. The Groundsman has been informed of the date with no issues.</p> <p>The new benches are in the process of being put in situ.</p> <p>Work on the fence around the pond has been completed.</p> <p>The issue of the timer on the public toilet has been resolved.</p> <p>Quotes for the production and installation of the new play equipment have been accepted and invoices paid. A date for installation is pending subject to a delivery date.</p> <p>A quote was received as per appendix 4 to replace tyres on the tractor. Two new front tyres were required to match as they no longer made the size of the tyre for the tyre required.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Cosson and seconded by Cllr Ward and: Resolved: to approve the quote of £594.50 + VAT from Ernest Doe for two new tyres for the tractor.</p> <p>A quote for a remotely accessed system to control the heating and hot water at the Pavilion was received as per appendix 5 and had been previously distributed to the Amenities Committee on the 4th of December. The Clerk advised that there was insufficient budget in the Pavilion repairs and maintenance item, but that money could be vired from the capital equipment budget to cover the quote of £1150 + VAT.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Hemingway and seconded by Cllr Ward and Resolved: to approve the quote of £1150 + VAT from Ernest Doe to install a hive heating and hot water remote system.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Hemingway and seconded by Cllr Cosson and: Resolved: to approve the virement of money from the capital equipment budget to the Pavilion repairs and maintenance budget to cover the costs of the hive system installation as per above.</p> <p>A large chunk of metal has sheered from the groundsman's tractor which he will look for to weld back on. The tractor is still operational.</p> <p>The Clerk was requested for the next amenities committee to look at costed solutions for leasing or purchasing a replacement of the current tractor and give recommendations and estimated value for the current tractor and suggest if EMR's are required for this,</p>	Clerk
9.	<p>Village Hall</p> <p>Works on redecoration of the inner corridor and committee room are complete except for an area on the ceiling where there are Velux windows, and the clerk is investigating potential leaks and replacement due to deterioration. The Clerk was requested to investigate if the windows needed replacing like for like or if the need to be opening windows or if other options were possible.</p> <p>Works on the taps in the ladies and gents in the annex toilets took place on Tuesday 10th of December and has resolved the issues.</p> <p>Works on the intruder, fire alarm and access systems were due to complete on the 6th of December but there are still some small areas to finalise prior to handover that will be done with staff and Cllr Hurwitz.</p> <p>Information requested re H & S for installation of the new Kitchen and kitchenette was discussed at the Amenities committee meeting on the 4th of December. The Clerk is working on getting an installation date with Knebworth bathrooms further to approval of quote at the Amenities Committee.</p>	Clerk

	A quote to redecorate the rear lobby at the Village Hall was approved by the amenities committee on the 4 th of December and a start date is awaited.	
10.	<p>Station Pub</p> <p>Works on the ceiling repair is complete except for painting of the new plaster board which the landlord has rescheduled to early new year.</p> <p>Further to a meeting with the tenants attended by the Clerk, Cllr Charter and Cllr Willocks a further schedule of works has been done with what was outstanding work from the previous schedule that was due to have been done under the existing lease (See Appendix 6) With the commencement of the new lease in February 2025 the PC will need to decide how it goes about these works and whose responsibility it is or if any leeway to negotiate. It was agreed that the internal redecoration could be done around the beginning of March at the start of the new lease, with the external redecoration less urgent but should be agreed to look at in the next 12 months.</p> <p>The landlord also got a quote for a wood burner and has requested if a 50/50% payment can be arranged to get this done (See Appendix 7). This has been added to the schedule. The Clerk was requested to ask the tenants for a more comprehensive quote and survey of the area for the wood burner and to look at doing this work along with other work that needs doing with scaffolding such as chimney stack and/or roof works.</p> <p>The specification of the works for the Gents toilet was requested to be looked at again.</p>	
11.	<p>To receive an update on Settle owner areas in the Parish</p> <p>Following discussion with representatives from Settle the following response was given.</p> <p>“The area of land at the end of the garages by the Scout hut has been cut back with self-sets removed and Ivy reduced, the area was also sprayed but with little effect at this time. It is worth noting that much of the growth that is impacting the Scout hut is on the fence between the Scout hut and the back garden of the neighbouring house.</p> <p>The laundry area behind the Village Hall has also been cleared with self-sets and weeds removed. The Ivy on the boundary fence has been partially collared to slow growth and weaken the plant for future works. I will ask the team to return in the next two or three weeks to cut back or remove as possible the Ivy on our side of the fence and if weather permits to respray both areas.</p> <p>With regards to the two hedges, under our resident’s agreement non-communal gardens are the responsibility of the residents. It is the responsibility of the landowner that the hedges are encroaching to raise concerns with the residents directly if they wish to. Apologies I can’t help further with this. To clarify the paragraph, the hedges are in the gardens of the settle properties, within the tenancy agreement the gardens and maintenance are the responsibility of the residents. The hedges are encroaching onto the Highways adopted footpath. Highways have adopted the responsibility to maintain the land that is being encroached, they may do this by cutting back to boundary themselves or writing to the residents to request the residents undertake this. Highways have adopted the footpath and land, this does not mean ownership just a responsibility to maintain, the adopted land is not under Settle ownership. We have logged a case with Highways so they will review this.”</p>	

	<p>As Settle claims no responsibility for the land in question the Clerk followed up on the case logged with Highways with HCC and got the following response from Highways and from County Councillor Richard Thake.</p> <p>“I note that Settle made comment that they have logged a case through Hertfordshire County Council’s (HCC) reporting system. If this has been through the following link: What's wrong with the trees, hedges, weeds or grass? Hertfordshire County Council Settle will be able to obtain updates on individual reports by re-visiting the website and entering the reference number generated when first reported. Any overgrowth from HCC hedging / trees should always be reported through HCC’s reporting system. “</p> <p>Regarding areas not being considered to be highway maintainable, I would suggest in the first instance going through HCC’s reporting system as the highway boundary shown at the end of the email is dated September 2007 and may well have been updated over the last 17 years. I would also suggest contacting North Herts Council who may be able to assist you with ownership of the areas of land at the junction of Hornbeam Spring / Gunn Lane and Gunn Lane / Stockens Green.”</p> <p>Response from Richard Thake</p> <p>“Jodee, whilst I do not have access to exact details here, on the face of it, I am afraid that the response from Settle does not appear to meet with my understanding of responsibilities that remain with landowners around encroachment restrictions on highway land, whether that be road, footpath, or verge.</p> <p>Obstruction of this nature, by overgrowth, or other causation is a matter for the landowners to resolve/restore. It is not the case that overgrowth becomes a responsibility for the adjoining landowner, whether this is a local authority, or a private owner.</p> <p>True, the injured party has a legal right to cut back growth which oversales a boundary, but HCC is not able to expend public purse money to rectify a landowner’s lack of maintenance.</p> <p>HCC do have powers to recoup costs in rectifying, if a landowner refuses so to do. Clearly this is an action of last resort. Ne hopes Settle will adopt a more responsible attitude on this matter and not continue to expect public funds to be directed at their shortcomings.” The Clerk has followed up with representatives from Settle to ask them to chase up on their case reported to HCC.</p> <p>In addition to the above an issue at Cherry Close garages regarding flooding and graffiti has been reported via Cllr Ward to the relevant agents now managing this area for Settle.</p> <p>Councillors requested if these areas were something that the Council’s Groundsman could look at. The Clerk agreed that this was something that could be investigated and said that she would set up a walk around with some Councillors and the Groundsman along with the Clerk. Cllr Charter said that if any of the areas require trees to be cut down that HCC will provide five trees for replanting, and this would be good to be considered.</p>	
12.	<p>To receive an update from the Clerk</p> <p>Work is still to be done on planning application for a mast for the CCTV in the Recreation Ground and a date for commencement of this work still to be arranged.</p>	

13.	Finance	
13.1	<p><i>To approve the list of payments 1 to 30 November 2024</i></p> <p>The list of payments 1 to 30 November was distributed prior to the meeting. The list of payment were reviewed and Councillors queried payments to Google and Sage if these were able to be stopped if back-ups can be made. Clerk to investigate.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Stringer and seconded by Cllr Ward and Resolved: to approve the list of payments 1 to 30 November 2024.</p>	Clerk
13.2	<p><i>To approve the bank reconciliation for 1 to 30 November 2024</i></p> <p>The bank reconciliation for November 2024 was distributed prior to the meeting.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Hemingway and seconded by Cllr Cosson and Resolved: to approve the bank reconciliation 1 to 30 November 2024.</p>	
13.3	<p><i>To review and approve quotes</i></p> <p>An estimate was received for moving of the water meter at the Village Hall which was something that the previous Clerk had been trying to get done for some time and the Clerk has been following up on.</p> <p>Councillors did not approve the estimate or for the work to get done as was thought that the water company should be finding the meter and reading it at regular intervals.</p>	
13.4	<p><i>To receive the forecast EOY 2024/25 budget and draft budget for 2025/26</i></p> <p>Appendix 10 shows proposed budget for 2025/26 plus current year and 2023/24 spend.</p> <p>The proposed budget for 2025/26 sheet shows 3 years' worth of budget, which being the actuals for 2023/24, actuals plus forecast for 2024/25 to give predicted EOY figures, and then a draft budget for 2025/26.</p> <p>Appendix 11 is the budget notes to show considerations used to set the 2025/26 budget.</p> <p>The budget given has been updated slightly from that at last PC meeting and following on from the Finance and Committee meeting on the 4th of December as well as comparing Scribe to the budget that was sent to North Herts with our precept request.</p> <p>There are still some very slight discrepancies with what Scribe is showing compared to the excel spreadsheet budget that was submitted to North Herts District Council in January 2024. This is due to items such as receipts in advance for the financial year which are simply to aid at year end with accruals and etc.... and these sums will be allocated to the 2025/26 budget at year end.</p> <p>The budget suggests a higher budget than precept requested so that our general reserves are used to make up the shortfall. This is similar to the way the budget was set for 2024/5. The total budget for 2024/5 for receipts was £323,808.34 and expenditure £377,015.00. The difference between these two equates to circa £53,207 which would have been taken from general reserves if the budget was accurate. This has not happened as we are forecasting more receipts than budgeted and less expenditure. Instead of eating into our general reserves during the 2024/25 financial year I am expecting the reverse and to see a growth in the Council's bank balance of circa £40/45k year on year i.e. approx. £40k more by 31 March 2025 than we had in March 2024.</p>	

	<p>Similarly with the budget for 2025/26 receipts (less precept and CTRS Grant) equates to £148,040 which less the predicted spend of £405,802 comes to £257,762 which officially would be the figure to equate to the precept demand. However, the sum now input for the precept and CTRS into the receipts figures comes to £345,805 and this less the expected expenditure of £405,802 comes to a deficit of £59,997 which is broadly like the £53,207 that was anticipated for this current financial year. In the worst-case scenario, we would take this circa £60k from reserves but this would be the worst-case scenario.</p> <p>It was suggested that the budget is updated with any EMR's agreed for at this meeting and presented again for approval at the next Full Parish Council meeting.</p>	Clerk
13.5	<p><i>To receive the suggested earmarked reserves report for 2025/26 budget year.</i></p> <p>The Clerk distributed reserves balance report (appendices 13). Items on the report were discussed.</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Stringer and seconded by Cllr Ward and: Resolved: to approve the suggested reserves for 2025/26.</p>	
13.6	<p><i>To receive and approve Scribe EOY Health Check</i></p> <p>The cost of the Scribe EOY Health Check is £99+ VAT. As the amount was below the spend deferred to the Clerk there was no decision required but all approved for this check to be carried out.</p>	
14.	<p>Exclusion of Members of Public and Press</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Ward and seconded by Cllr Stringer and Resolved: that under Section 100A (2) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Public and Press be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business being transacted.</p>	
15.	<p>Staff Update</p> <p>The contract cleaners are working well currently, and casuals are usually able to cover the Pavilion clean on Sundays.</p> <p>The Groundsman is taking some time off for Christmas and the Clerk will monitor leave and work requirements.</p> <p>The Clerk continues to work and attend sessions for her CiLCA qualification. There were no other reported staffing matters.</p>	
16.	<p>Inclusion of Members of Public and Press</p> <p>It was proposed by Cllr Stringer and seconded by Cllr Hemingway and Resolved: to readmit members of the Public.</p>	
17.	<p>To consider notification of any other matters not noted elsewhere in the agenda for information only.</p> <p>Cllr Ward reported that there has been flooding on the B197 by the Odyssey development that there is an enforcement case raised regarding 2/3 planning conditions about surface water flood mitigation being investigated.</p> <p>Cllr Ward advised that the costs of parking in the St Martin's Road car park were due to rise along with others in the district and the Clerk confirmed that she had received an email about this subject and a decision needed regarding the Parish Council support for the scheme.</p> <p>As support to fund 30 minutes of free parking had already been approved on many occasions awaiting the Traffic Regulation order from North Herts District</p>	

	<p>Council to take effect Councillors confirmed that the Clerk should reply to the transport team to say that the Parish Council still supports funding the 30 minutes parking and this will be reviewed during 2025.</p> <p>Regarding the Neighbourhood plan Cllr Ward advised that Codicote had just submitted their plan for Regulation 16 consultation. Cllr Ward said that the Parish Council need to decide if they want to claim for locality funding for this year and this needs to be decided before the end of March for grant application purposes. Cllr Ward said that it will require someone to drive Version 2 of the Neighbourhood plan and confirm with our Planning Consultant Jacqueline Veater what is to be done. Regarding KB1/2 developers will do an updated master plan to present to NHDC to be approved prior to formal planning application in outline for access & etc.... Consultation by the developers is expected to start early January on the masterplan. Regarding KB4 this is live in the planning system for outline approval but there he understands that there still some environmental considerations under review etc... The Parish Council stance on a access routes to the Local Plan sites and relief road will also need to be decided upon – including whether to include this in the neighbourhood plan or otherwise.</p>	
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The meeting closed at 10.15p.m.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____