

FARNHAM ROYAL PARISH COUNCIL

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF FARNHAM ROYAL PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON MONDAY 24 JANUARY 2022 AT 7.30 P.M. AT FARNHAM COMMON VILLAGE HALL

Present

Paul Rowley (Chair)	Marilyn Rolfe
Bob Milne	Richard Thomas
Jenny Quilter	Jigar Trivedi
Judith Hall (Clerk)	

One member of the public and County Cllr. Dhillon

The Chair declared the meeting open at 7.30pm. The meeting was adjourned for OPEN FORUM noted at the end of these minutes. The Chair reconvened the meeting.

22/1/PC Apologies for absence

David Moore (although he joined by telephone for items 119.8 and 119.9)

22/2/PC Declarations of Interest

None

22/3/PC To confirm the minutes of the meetings held on 29 November 2021

The minutes were **approved** and **it was agreed** that they would be signed by the Chair.

22/4PC Matters Arising (not covered elsewhere on the agenda - for information only)

The Chairman advised that prior to the meeting all councillors had been provided with a report detailing the items under this section. The report can be downloaded from the Parish Council website.

4.1 Judy Tipping retirement – the report was noted and the Chairman formally thanked Judy Tipping for her service over the years.

4.2 Update on tree survey – the report was noted and the Clerk advised that she would be requesting quotes shortly. The Clerk also advised that there was uncertainty regarding the boundary of Jubilee Copse with Hammonds End. The arboriculturist had advised that he always assumed the boundary was a drainage ditch but there are some trees past the drainage ditch which overhang properties and a resident has complained. The Clerk advised that the Land Registry Title Plan did not confirm the boundary so she emailed the Estates Team at Buckinghamshire Council, she had not received a response. It was felt by those present that it would be prudent for the arboriculturist to survey these trees now and include them in future surveys.

4.3 Update on Subject Access Request – the report was noted.

22/5/PC Devolved Services:

5.1 To consider a one year extension to the Local Council Devolution Scheme Agreement with Buckinghamshire Council

5.1.1 Bob Milne advised that the original agreement was for four years and at the time it was signed two parish councillors, who no longer serve on the council, were very keen on entering into the agreement. He acknowledged that the parish council had learnt a lot during the agreement and had become aware that previously Buckinghamshire County Council was not fulfilling its responsibilities in respect of verge maintenance allowing saplings to grow. He continued that four people had been involved in managing the devolved services; Hilda Holder (when she was clerk), the current clerk, Roger Home and him. Initially the annual costs of providing the required services were £15,000 to £18,000 with about another £5,000 in extras. He acknowledged that there had been some positives as a result of taking on devolved services such as improvements to the parish and employing a full-time clerk but he also felt there were negatives such as a doubling in the cost of providing the required services and a 30% increase in the precept over the last three years due to the increased costs and clerk's salary. He advised that there was no problem with the contactor's work just some minor irritations. He felt it really came down to the fact that the amount received from Buckinghamshire Council had remained at around £9,000 whilst the parish council's costs had doubled. He also advised that there were lots of grey areas over what was actually devolved in terms of areas and work and that all of this detracted from larger projects that are the responsibility of the Parish

Council. He asked why the parish council should carry out work which allows Buckinghamshire Council not to do what it should be doing. He felt that to date the parish council had been prudent and responsible in setting the precept but if the parish council continued with devolved services there would need to be a big percentage increase in order to maintain the financial recovery plan currently in place which aims to reach reserves of £90,000 by 31 March 2024 whilst continuing with projects that benefit the community.

5.1.2 Jenny Quilter felt it would be useful to consider any proposed increase in precept in cash terms rather than as a percentage. Bob Milne reminded those present that it is the percentage figure that is reported to residents by Buckinghamshire Council. He felt that as the parish council had learnt a lot during the period of the agreement it would be possible for the parish council to hold Buckinghamshire Council to account over the work they carry out. Jenny Quilter advised that whilst she was not fixed on a particular percentage increase, she had similar thoughts to Bob Milne and noted that the parish council was having to pay a lot more to provide the service than it was receiving from Buckinghamshire Council. She asked whether it would be possible to discuss terms with Buckinghamshire Council. The Clerk advised that it was her understanding that the amount received was calculated using a fixed square meter amount applied to the size of the parish. Jenny Quilter advised that spending £36,000 on devolved services and receiving only £9,000 from Buckinghamshire Council placed a significant burden on the parish council. Having seen the actual cash increase required in the precept to maintain devolved services and carry out the parish projects she felt better but noted that any increase will affect low income households. She asked whether a middle ground could be found such as extending the time to get back to reserves of £90,000 until 31 March 2025.

5.1.3 Richard Thomas advised that he had asked the Clerk to contact Stoke Poges Parish Council to find out their experience as they never took on devolved services. He also advised that he spoke to the Clerk at Chalfont St Peter Parish Council which he acknowledged had a much larger precept at approximately £400,000 and owns £1million of grass cutting equipment. He advised that Chalfont St Peter Parish Council did take on devolved services for one year but they found that Buckinghamshire Council weren't siding out and they lost some employees so they handed back devolved services two years ago. Their parish receives two to three grass cuts a year from Buckinghamshire Council and the parish council can increase this if needed. He advised that the Clerk at Stoke Poges Parish Council had advised that they positively encourage residents to cut the verges outside their own properties. He advised that Seer Green is not a devolved parish as they had already handed back devolved services. He also advised that Chalfont St. Giles are considering handing back devolved services. The Chalfont St Peter Clerk commented that the terms being offered just didn't add up. Richard Thomas added that a decision to hand back devolved services would impact on performance management which could be challenging with our contractors but will be more challenging with Buckinghamshire Council. The Clerk at Chalfont St Peter expressed that she has very little contact from their TfB Local Area Technician.

5.1.4 Marilyn Rolfe advised that Burnham Parish Council is devolved but they are struggling to provide the services as they have lost one of the maintenance teams. She advised that she had changed her mind as she agreed with the comments being made in this discussion. She felt the focus of the parish council should be put on performance managing Buckinghamshire Council to ensure standards are maintained and on completing parish council projects but she noted that three cuts a year would not result in the beautifully manicured verges liked by some residents.

5.1.5 Jigar Trivedi agreed that from a financial perspective continuing with devolved services doesn't make any sense but he was concerned that residents may not be happy to cut the verges outside their houses. He raised his concern that messy, uncut verges could increase fly tipping and litter. He felt that three cuts a year was not enough and suggested that the parish council may need to provide additional cuts and include this in the budget.

5.1.6 Richard Thomas reminded those present that the decision to take on devolved services was made for a reason so if the contract was to be handed back these reasons should be covered.

5.1.7 The Chairman thanked Bob Milne for his comments and advised that when he came to the meeting he thought handing back devolved services would be an awful decision but having listened to the comments he felt differently. He advised that he had spoken to friends who live in Stoke Poges who had stated that the culture in Stoke Poges is to mow the verge outside their homes themselves. It was noted that the verges cut by Buckinghamshire Council such as those in Duffield Lane were very overgrown and cars can't pass each other. He also added that the profile of what needs cutting in Stoke Poges is different. The Chairman advised that the precept per house in Stoke Poges was significantly larger than the precept per house in Farnham Royal. Bob Milne advised that the tax base for Stoke Poges was a lot smaller. The Chairman raised that if the contract was handed back on 31 March 2022 as was being discussed, there would be no time to plan before the 2022 summer season. Bob Milne advised that only three cuts would take place between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. Richard Thomas felt that most verges are where they need to be in terms of maintenance. The Chairman advised that he was not challenging a decision to hand the contract back but he felt there wasn't long enough to properly organise it. Bob Milne felt the parish council needed a plan of what needed to be done before the 2022 summer season.

5.1.8 Richard Thomas raised that no councillor is going to performance manage all of the contracts so there would be a cost for engaging someone to do that. Bob Milne disagreed as he felt that a Working

Group should monitor performance. Richard Thomas was concerned about the amount of time it would take for a councillor to performance manage the contracts as he felt going to a reactive approach was not desirable. Bob Milne felt a problem would be not knowing when Buckinghamshire Council would carry out work as even if there is a plan things such as wet weather can lead to delays. He felt this was a disadvantage of not using the parish councils own contractors and handing back the contract. The Chairman agreed that a lot of work already falls on a few councillors and they can't be relied on to take on more work. Richard Thomas said ideally someone would go round the parish twice a year with the contracts' specifications and decide whether the specification had been met. This is a proactive approach rather than just being reactive and sending complaints up to a black hole in Buckinghamshire Council. Marilyn Rolfe added that it does take a long time to deal with Buckinghamshire Council. Bob Milne stated that under the current system he looked at three complaints in September 2021 and the work was not carried out until December 2021 so it would be unfair to expect a quicker service from Buckinghamshire Council. He advised that he would be happy to survey things twice a year. The Chairman advised that he was behind appointing someone to performance manage the contracts.

5.1.9 Jigar Trivedi felt that the best way forward was to hand back the contract and budget for extra grass cuts.

5.1.10 The following plan of action **was agreed**:

- Hand back the devolved services contract
- Communicate the hand back to residents
- Identify the areas that will not be covered by Buckinghamshire Council
- Notify Amersham Town Council of the decision
- Find out the cost of extra cuts/works

5.2 To consider an extension to the Parish Council's agreement with Amersham Town Council

Given the decision above, not to extend the Local Council Devolution Scheme Agreement, it **was agreed** that an extension would not be entered into with Amersham Town Council.

22/6/PC Finance:

6.1 To consider the Parish Council's Contribution towards the Blackpond Lane Footway Extension

The Parish Council's Contribution of £7,717.32 towards the Blackpond Lane Footway Extension **was agreed**.

6.2 To consider the Parish Council's Contribution towards the Templewood Lane Dropped Kerbs

The Parish Council's Contribution of £6,539.05 towards the Templewood Lane Dropped Kerbs **was agreed**.

6.3 To consider replacing both flag poles

It **was agreed** that both flag poles should be replaced given this was recommended in the annual services. The Clerk will now obtain additional quotes as required.

6.4 To ratify the costs of Christmas in The Farnhams

The total costs of £2,551.53 plus VAT **were ratified**. The Chairman noted that the Government's 'Welcome Back Fund' from Buckinghamshire Council had agreed to reimburse some of the costs.

6.5 To consider adopting the National Minimum Wage

It **was agreed** that the hourly rate paid to the litter pickers would be increased to £9.50 in line with the National Minimum Wage.

6.6 To approve payments and note receipts, as per the cashbook

The payments and receipts, as per the cashbook, **were agreed**.

6.7 To consider the December 2021 Management Accounts

The Chairman, as Chair of the Finance Committee, asked those present to confirm that they had reviewed the management accounts and accompanying notes. Those present confirmed they had.

Bob Milne asked the Clerk to explain the difference in the brought forward figure for 1 April 2021 in the original budget and in the revised forecast contained in the management accounts. The Clerk explained that it was largely the result of late invoicing for arboriculture work and Community Board match funding.

Mr. Rowley asked those present whether they had any other comments or questions and those present confirmed not. The management accounts **were agreed**.

6.8 To consider the 2022/23 budget

6.8.1 Those present reviewed the prepared budget line by line most lines remained unaltered but there was debate regarding:

- The Farnham Common Playground Project - Bob Milne felt that the money allocated (£10,000) was unlikely to be needed during the financial year. Richard Thomas explained that at a meeting with a group of residents about the project they had asked how much the parish council had been providing for to replace the playground so there is an expectation that funds are being put aside for the project. It was suggested that the figure of £10,000 should be included in the budget. Bob Milne suggested removing the £10,000 provision for a project to tidy up Boundary Copse but those present felt it should stay in the budget.
- The Contract Performance Management - Bob Milne felt that this expenditure (£2,500) was not

required as a working group could performance manage the contracts and asked if it was only for the devolved services. Richard Thomas confirmed the person would be performance managing all of the parish council contracts and he did not think any councillor would be able to take on that level of work. It was suggested that the figure of £2,500 should be included in the budget.

- The 'extra works' items - Bob Milne felt this should not be identified as expenditure but added to the general reserves as expenditure items effect the precept. It was suggested that as the figures included in the budget were based on current expenditure they should be included as expenditure.

6.8.2 The Chairman asked those present to vote on the revised expenditure. Marilyn Rolfe, Jigar Trivedi, Jenny Quilter, Richard Thomas, David Moore and Paul Rowley voted in favour of the revised expenditure. Bob Mine voted against the revised expenditure. The revised expenditure **was agreed**

6.9 To agree the 2022/23 precept

It was noted that if all of the above expenditure was included in the budget a higher precept would be required unless the recovery plan was delayed. The Chairman advised that he would be happy to talk to the internal auditor with the Clerk about any delay. The Clerk was asked to check what the reserve amount should be given that the parish council is aiming for six months of contractual expenditure and by handing back the devolved services this amount would reduce. Jenny Quilter felt that the increase in the cost of living would be justification for a delay. Bob Milne advised that having reserves of six months was not just required by the auditor but was in line with national guidance. Marilyn Rolfe advised that Buckinghamshire Council was increasing its portion of the council tax by 3.99% with an additional increase of 2% for social care. Bob Milne felt it was necessary for councillors to agree a maximum percentage they were happy to increase the parish precept by. Given the significance of the decision to be made it was suggested that the Clerk should update the budget spreadsheet with the expenditure decisions made, which she was not able to do at the meeting and then the precept could be agreed by email. It was suggest that a meeting should be held so that a proper discussion could be had. A meeting was then proposed for Friday morning at a time to be agreed.

22/7/PC Planning:

7.1 To consider membership of the Planning Working Group

The Chairman advised that the Terms of Reference for this working group required a minimum of four councillors to be members. As a result of Judy Tipping's retirement membership had dropped to three. The Chairman ask whether any other councillors would like to join the Group. Nobody volunteered so it **was agreed** that the Terms of reference would be amended to a minimum of three councillors to be members and a quorum would be two Councillors to include the Chairman or Vice Chairman of the Parish Council.

7.2 To ratify comments submitted on recent applications

Marilyn Rolfe, as Chair of the Planning Working Group, drew councillors' attention to the comment submitted on application PL/21/4671/FA Land Adjacent To The Laurels, Crown Lane, Farnham Royal and urged all councillors to review the application and the work already carried out. In addition, she also drew councillors' attention to application PL/21/4665/FA Land East Of Cut Heath House, Parsonage Lane, Farnham Common and urged all councillors to review the application in conjunction with the other applications for the same site. The planning comments on the circulated schedule **were ratified**

7.3 To note recent planning decisions

The planning decisions on the circulated schedule **were noted**.

22/8/PC Any Other Business (for information only)

8.1 Jenny Quilter advised that she would be attending on behalf of the Parish Council, the Burnham Beeches Stoke Common Consultative Meeting on 27 January 2022 via zoom.

8.2 Richard Thomas advised that Farnham Common Sports Club had purchased an ANPR camera and had upgraded the camera overlooking the playground.

22/9/PC Next meeting

The meeting closed at 10.10pm. The next meeting will be held on 21 February 2022 at 7.30pm at Farnham Royal Village Hall

OPEN FORUM

The Chairman asked Judy Tipping if she had anything she wished to say. Judy tipping advised that she had decided to retire from the Parish Council for personal reasons. She confirmed that she is still very

happy to share her historical knowledge of the parish. Those present thanked her for all her efforts over the years that she had served on the Parish Council

The Chairman asked Cllr. Dhillon if he had any information or issues to share and asked him whether he felt the Community Boards were working as this had been raised at a recent meeting of the South Buckinghamshire Association of Local Councils ('SBALC'), that he attended. Cllr. Dhillon felt that the Beeches Community Board was not working as he had hoped largely due to some charities, some parish councils and some councillors not engaging enough with the Board. He stressed that the Board is about more than just asking for money as it is meant to be a place to share ideas. He advised that he and Cllr. Anthony had raised this with the Buckinghamshire Council Cabinet Member and had asked for feedback from other community boards and guidance on how to take the Beeches Community Board forward. The Chairman asked about funding for the Board in 2022/23. Cllr. Dhillon advised that he had been told that the Board would not be allowed to carry any surplus from 2021/22 into 2022/23 but the details of the 2022/23 funding had not yet been released. The Chairman advised that SBALC was clear that there would be no rollover and the funding for 2022/23 will be reduced.

Cllr. Dhillon wanted to publicise the consultation on proposals for new council wards and ward boundaries for Buckinghamshire Council which began on 11 January 2022 and closes on 4 April 2022. He stressed that this provides an opportunity to bring Farnham Common and Farnham Royal into the same ward. He explained that currently Farnham Common is in the Farnham Common & Burnham Beeches ward but Farnham Royal is in the Stoke Poges & Wexham ward. He urged those present to respond to the consultation. Richard Thomas stated that this should be advertised on Facebook and the Parish Council website. The Chairman suggested that although the copy deadline had passed for the Farnhams Magazine, it may be possible to include a short statement on this. Richard Thomas suggested that Cllr. Dhillon produced a set of words that could then be used to publicise the consultation. Other ideas for publicising were the Nextdoor App or representatives outside Sainsbury's on The Broadway.

Cllr. Dhillon advised that a Buckinghamshire Council jobs fair is being held on 5 March 2022.

Cllr. Dhillon advised that the next meeting with Thames Water had been arranged for 3pm on 11 February 2022 at Farnham Common Village Hall. Jenny Quilter advised Cllr. Dhillon that she had asked Joy Morrissey MP for a separate update and will forward a copy of the email received to him for his information.

Cllr. Dhillon advised that he was chasing the Beeches Community Board for progress with the three agreed projects.

Cllr. Dhillon advised that he was chasing Mark Davis, the Parking Manager, at Buckinghamshire Council for the outcome of the parking consultation and he had been contacted by a lot of residents requesting an update.